

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

May 18, 2009  
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room  
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Degginger, Deputy Mayor Balducci, and Councilmembers Bonincontri, Chelminiak, Davidson, and Lee

ABSENT: Councilmember Noble

1. Executive Session

Deputy Mayor Balducci opened the meeting at 6:00 p.m. and declared recess to Executive Session for approximately 25 minutes to discuss one item of pending litigation and one item of property acquisition.

The Study Session resumed at 6:43 p.m., with Mayor Degginger presiding.

2. Study Session

- (a) East Link – Review of Sound Transit Board of Directors Locally Preferred Alternative

City Manager Steve Sarkozy reported that the Sound Transit Board of Directors met last week to select a preferred preliminary alignment for the East Link light rail project.

Bernard van de Kamp, Regional Projects Manager, reviewed a map showing the preferred alignments for the four East Link segments. Segment A connects downtown Seattle to the East Channel bridge in South Bellevue with light rail operating in the I-90 center roadway.

Councilmember Davidson questioned the allocation of costs for Segment A in Seattle. Mr. van de Kamp said the issue was not discussed last Thursday. However, his understanding is that the Rainier Avenue station will be funded by the North King County Subarea, and the balance will be funded by the East King County Subarea.

Continuing, Mr. van de Kamp said that the preferred alignment for Segment B (South Bellevue to SE 8<sup>th</sup> Street) is a modified option B3. The City's recommendation was adopted in part by the Sound Transit Board, with some modifications requested by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). This option preserves eastbound and westbound HOV direct access

ramps. The Board was favorable to Bellevue's proposed side-running modified B3 option along Bellevue Way and 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE. For the portion between SE 8<sup>th</sup> Street and Main Street, the Board indicated a preference for the original concept that goes along the side of the Bellevue Club. However, Sound Transit will be looking at some design modifications to minimize the impacts on the club's parking lot, adjacent commercial properties, and wetlands.

Responding to Councilmember Chelminiak, Mr. van de Kamp said the alignment goes along the east side of the Bellevue Club's parking lot.

Responding to Councilmember Davidson, Mr. van de Kamp said the alignment is elevated over SE 8<sup>th</sup> Street and SE 6<sup>th</sup> Street until it connects to Segment C at the Red Lion hotel site. The route goes along the east side between 114<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the Hilton property.

For Segment C the Sound Transit Board prefers the C4A at-grade option, and is willing to consider the C3T with a deep bore tunnel under 108<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE as an option subject to a financing plan. Although Council's preferred alternative, C2T, will not be advancing to the next engineering phase, questions raised during the draft EIS process related to C2T will be further evaluated.

Responding to Councilmember Davidson, Mr. van de Kamp said all of the options enter the downtown from the Red Lion site at Main Street and 112<sup>th</sup>. With option C3T, there is a short covered segment under Main Street that turns north at 108<sup>th</sup>, which transitions to a short cut and cover segment near 108<sup>th</sup> Avenue and NE 12<sup>th</sup> Street. It then transitions from the tunnel to an elevated structure in the McCormick Park area.

Mr. van de Kamp explained that the preferred option for Segment D is D2A, which is an at-grade alignment along the NE 16<sup>th</sup> corridor. This is the option selected by the Council as the preferred alternative as well.

Mr. van de Kamp reviewed the major differences between Sound Transit's and Bellevue's preferences. The City Council did not see a significant benefit in preserving the eastbound HOV lane at Bellevue Way and I-90 based on the technical analysis and the estimated cost of \$25 million. However, Sound Transit preserves the lane in its preferred alternative.

For the alignment between SE 8<sup>th</sup> Street and Main Street, the Council preferred a turn to the east just south of SE 8<sup>th</sup> Street to go toward the I-405 right-of-way. The Sound Transit Board did not pursue that option. Also as noted above, the C2T alternative is not advancing as a preferred alternative at this point but will be further evaluated to confirm some of the conclusions in the draft environmental impact statement (EIS).

Mr. van de Kamp described additional issues related to Sound Transit's preferred alternative. The first is the at-grade traffic analysis that staff has been directed to pursue at the City level to compare conclusions with Sound Transit's analysis. The Sound Transit Board suggested the creation of a peer review group as part of this work. City staff will meet with Sound Transit staff to clarify the intent of this direction from the Board.

Mr. van de Kamp said the Sound Transit Board provided direction to address the City's comments and the community's concerns regarding the C2T (106<sup>th</sup> Avenue tunnel) option by the end of the year. With regard to the 124<sup>th</sup> Avenue station, the Wright Runstad Spring District development includes a proposal to have a retained cut or partially covered station. This has been advanced as a design option. The Sound Transit Board's motion indicates that a public-private partnership would be needed to support this element.

Responding to Councilmember Lee, Mr. van de Kamp explained that Sound Transit conducted an at-grade traffic analysis as part of the draft EIS, and subsequently developed a traffic simulation model to determine whether there would be severe traffic impacts. The agency's conclusion last winter was that construction of light rail did not have a significant impact on downtown Bellevue traffic operations. City staff have reservations about that conclusion and are proposing to create a separate traffic simulation model for the downtown in order to test additional details and assumptions, including the Bel-Red land use forecast which was not considered in Sound Transit's analysis.

Transportation Director Goran Sparrman recalled discussion during last year's budget planning regarding the need to advance additional transportation planning in downtown Bellevue, in part to expand the City's planning horizon from 2020 to 2030. The proposed traffic analysis for light rail planning will be beneficial to the City's overall planning as well.

Mayor Degginger feels this is a good opportunity for the City to run its own data simulations using additional assumptions, and to share this analysis with Sound Transit.

Councilmember Lee concurred with the need for the City to conduct its own analysis. He expressed concern regarding the peer review approach if different conclusions are reached.

Deputy Mayor Balducci said that in general peer review is a good thing. She suggested finding a way to agree with Sound Transit in the selection of the peer reviewer. Ms. Balducci said arguing over the facts is a no-win situation. However, she thinks it will be important to be able to debate policy based upon a shared analysis.

Mr. van de Kamp reminded the Council that the identified preferred alternative is not the final formal action. When the final EIS is released in the summer of 2010, Sound Transit will either confirm its preference or select a different alternative.

Mr. van de Kamp explained that the Sound Transit Board's motion included a requirement for a finance plan to address the funding gap between the at-grade alternative versus tunneling alternatives. The Board included language suggesting that the City of Bellevue should formally identify funding sources to support a tunnel option by early 2010, in parallel with Sound Transit's engineering work. The Board requests interim reports from Sound Transit staff and the City of Bellevue identifying potential additional funding sources by the third quarter of 2009, and stating the potential value of such sources by the fourth quarter of 2009. This would lead to a formal finance plan by early 2010.

Councilmember Davidson noted that peer review was conducted for the Sound Transit Phase 1 ten-year plan, and that it does not always resolve issues.

Regarding the Sound Transit Board's position that additional funding sources should be formally identified by the City of Bellevue, Councilmember Chelminiak recalled previous letters from Sound Transit regarding working cooperatively to find funding. He hopes the City and the agency can work together in this regard.

Responding to Councilmember Bonincontri, Mr. van de Kamp said that Sound Transit's engineering work has given the agency a high level of confidence about the feasibility of carrying light rail across the I-90 bridge. The cost for Segment A from the International District in Seattle to the East Channel Bridge is \$750 million.

In further response to Councilmember Bonincontri, Mr. van de Kamp stated his understanding that Sound Transit's intent is to advance the C3T and C4A options into the engineering phase. Sound Transit expects to have engineering up to the 15 percent design level by the end of 2009 or early 2010, at which point the cost estimates can be updated. Mr. Sparrman added that in terms of the C2T option, some additional analysis will be needed to evaluate and respond to questions raised. That analysis is expected to occur relatively soon.

Councilmember Lee expressed concern regarding the tunnel options and the expectation that Bellevue identify funding sources. Mr. Sparrman said the City has cost estimates for different segments and alignments from the East Link DEIS report. These cost estimates will be refined as engineering progresses, and it might be possible to narrow the gap in resources based on the engineering work.

Councilmember Davidson questioned whether it is realistic to expect funding sources to be identified by early 2010.

Responding to Dr. Davidson, Mr. van de Kamp said Sound Transit is required to answer all questions raised in the draft EIS, and changes that have occurred since the draft EIS will need to be addressed in the final EIS. This includes roadway projects as well as population and employment growth reflected in the Bel-Red Plan.

Concurrent with development of the final EIS, there will likely be public workshops to discuss the locally preferred alternative and design elements to be incorporated into the final engineering. City staff will support Sound Transit's activities and work to address the 700 comments from the City on the draft EIS.

Dr. Davidson expressed concern that Sound Transit was not required to address questions raised in the draft EIS before selecting a preferred alternative. Mr. van de Kamp said the findings of the final EIS could cause Sound Transit to modify its preferred alternative.

Responding to Councilmember Bonincontri, Mr. van de Kamp said the final EIS is to be completed by July or August of 2010. The Sound Transit Board will then make its final decision on the preferred alternative and station locations, which will be forwarded to the Federal Transit Administration for a Record of Decision. The issuance of the Record of Decision could occur within weeks or months.

(b) Introduction of Downtown Urban Design and Livability Work Program

Mr. Sarkozy opened discussion regarding the Downtown Urban Design and Livability Initiative.

Planning Director Dan Stroh explained that the initiative involves updating Downtown regulations and design guidelines to better carry out the “Great Place Strategy” adopted in the Downtown Implementation Plan and Downtown Subarea Plan. He recalled that the DIP established a number of projects, many of which are completed or nearly completed including the NE 10<sup>th</sup> Street overpass, NE 8<sup>th</sup> Street widening, Pedestrian Corridor wayfinding and art walk, the new City Hall, the 1020 plaza and other open spaces in the downtown. Mr. Stroh briefly reviewed the summary of 2009-2010 Downtown Initiatives provided on page SS 2-13 of the meeting packet.

Mr. Stroh reviewed the Main Street and NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Street conceptual design project, which is responsive to recommendations in the DIP to widen NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and to evaluate design concepts in order to enhance the Main Street corridor’s character. The purpose of the effort is to look at street design and urban design improvements that can be implemented by the City, property owners, and developers.

The two alternatives for Main Street narrow the current five lanes to three or four lanes, with the extra right-of-way to be used for pedestrian facilities, on-street parking, and bike facilities. The concept for NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Street involves the future connection to an interchange at I-405 as well as streetscape features. Main Street Alternative 1 has bike lanes on both sides of the roadway. Alternative 2 has a bike lane on the uphill sections and shared bike/vehicle use on downhill sections.

Mr. Stroh said an open house on these concepts is scheduled for May 19, and a more in-depth discussion with the Council will be held in June or July.

Mayor Degginger requested that staff study a third Main Street alternative involving bike lanes that are not on the street but at the edge of the pedestrian walkway, as is done in many European cities.

Deputy Mayor Balducci noted her confusion regarding the vision for the downtown. The Council and staff have been discussing for several years the lack of transportation capacity in the downtown. Both Council and staff have been concerned about the implications for this limited right-of-way due to the possibility of locating light rail at the street grade. Ms. Balducci feels more analysis is needed before reducing traffic capacity in the downtown. She is concerned that the alternatives under consideration all reduce capacity on Main Street.

Transportation Director Goran Sparrman explained that analysis to date indicates that the section of Main Street east of Bellevue Way to 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue could sufficiently handle transportation capacity with three lanes. However, more capacity will continue to be needed closer to Bellevue Way. Mr. Sparrman noted that traffic bottlenecks tend to be at intersections, and it is therefore important to provide more capacity at intersections.

Deputy Mayor Balducci supports the goal of making that section of Main Street more pedestrian friendly. However, she is having a hard time seeing how this will not undermine the objective of maintaining overall capacity in the downtown.

Mr. Sparrman said he will talk with his staff about providing greater detail to the Council regarding the work that led to staff's approach for this project.

Councilmember Davidson concurred with Ms. Balducci's concerns. He noted the increase in multifamily housing and the current limitations of traffic capacity, especially west of Bellevue Way.

Responding to Councilmember Chelminiak, Mr. Sparrman said improvements to NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Street will help to enhance traffic flow in the Main Street area and the rest of the downtown. In further response, Mr. Sparrman confirmed that the NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Street improvements represent a long-term project in the I-405 master plan.

Councilmember Chelminiak said he is not opposed to modifications to Main Street. However, he concurs with Ms. Balducci's concerns about the loss of lane miles in the downtown. He questioned the introduction of this initiative at this time, given that the NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Street interchange will not be completed for 10 to 15 years. Mr. Sparrman said the concepts are based on extensive staff analysis and a review of alternatives. The next step in the process is to solicit public input on the concepts. He acknowledged the Council's concerns and said staff will be careful to not make any commitments to the public regarding the project.

Mayor Degginger stated that the Council is not comfortable with this initiative.

Mr. Sarkozy commented that Sound Transit's light rail planning represents a change in the downtown environment. He suggested a broader analysis of downtown transportation capacity within this context, including the need for bicycle capacity. Mr. Sarkozy proposed additional staff analysis and returning to Council in the coming months with more data upon which to base this planning.

Mayor Degginger recalled that when the last DIP update was completed in 2003, there was an enhanced focus on the pedestrian environment along Main Street and a greater vehicle orientation for NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. With the significant changes in transportation planning since that time, including light rail planning, Mr. Degginger said the Council is concerned about the comprehensive integration of and uncertainty surrounding transportation projects.

Continuing, Mr. Stroh said the purpose of tonight's presentation is to launch the urban design and livability initiative and the issues to be addressed, including review of an amenity incentive system, building form and height, design guidelines, pedestrian corridor guidelines, downtown parking standards, light rail interface, workforce and affordable housing, and financial tools to implement the Great Place strategy. He noted that the downtown amenity bonus system has essentially not been updated since 1981.

Mr. Stroh reviewed key opportunity areas for improvements within the downtown. The estimated budget for the initiative is \$220,000 as follows: 1) Completion of 3-D model, \$80,000, 2) Economic evaluation of incentive system, \$20,000, 3) Parking analysis, \$20,000, and 4) Urban design and environmental review, \$100,000. The funds are available in Capital Investment Program (CIP) project CD-19, DIP Implementation. Mr. Stroh reviewed the proposed schedule for this initiative, which anticipates Council adoption of a final plan in late 2010.

Councilmember Lee endorsed a continued focus on downtown planning and maintaining economic vitality.

Councilmember Bonincontri indicated her preliminary support of the concepts developed to date. She noted her interest in environmentally sustainable development and elements that encourage a healthy lifestyle.

Councilmember Chelminiak is hesitant to move forward with this project and is concerned about funding issues. He is not interested in a major effort or investment in the concepts at this time. He would prefer to see the funds allocated toward the Eastgate Subarea Plan update. Downtown priorities for him include space for the Eastside Heritage Center, municipal court facilities, affordable housing, and green spaces. He would like to see specific projects completed.

Responding to Mayor Degginger, Mr. Sarkozy said the topic will be brought back to the Council.

Deputy Mayor Balducci noted the significant planning efforts throughout the downtown and community in recent months, and suggested taking some time before launching another major initiative.

At 8:04 p.m., Mayor Degginger declared recess to the Regular Session. He noted that the Study Session will resume following the Regular Session.

(c) Off-leash Study Report and Recommendations

The Study Session reconvened at 9:43 p.m.

Parks and Community Services Director Patrick Foran reported that the Parks and Community Services Board supports the City's interest in studying off-leash dog issues and needs. Mr. Foran said that Park Board Chair Merle Keeney communicated that review of the study was a learning experience for the Board, and that the study carefully addressed the complexity of the

issues. The Park Board endorsed staff's recommendations in the draft off-leash study by a vote of 4-3. Concerns discussed by the Board included the one-year trial period, the appropriateness of using Neighborhood Enhancement Program (NEP) funds, and the recommendation for maintaining the off-leash area at Robinswood Park in lieu of the Eastgate area. The Board would like the City to allow the Eastgate master planning process to conclude before making a decision about locating an off-leash dog facility.

Glenn Kost, Parks Planning Manager, recalled that this issue surfaced approximately one year ago and has undergone six months of study. Dogs on leashes are currently allowed in all parks except beaches, the Botanical Garden, and on synthetic fields. There are two off-leash areas in Robinswood Park, and off-leash dogs are the subject of frequent complaints by park users. Mr. Kost showed a map of off-leash facilities in neighboring communities. He noted that facilities include fenced off-leash areas (OLAs) and unfenced, shared use areas.

Mr. Kost said staff recommends an equitable distribution of off-leash areas within the community and a total of four facilities. The recommended minimum size is one acre, while two to three acres is preferred. A smaller off-leash area of 5,000 square feet is recommended and considered sufficient for Downtown Park, which typically has smaller dogs. Additional potential sites include McCormick Park in the downtown, Wilburton Hill Park or the Highland/Glendale site in central Bellevue, and Lakemont Park in South Bellevue. Staff recommends a one-year trial period and funding through the Neighborhood Enhancement Program.

Mr. Kost explained that the Park Board does not support the use of NEP funds for off-leash areas, as this competes with other neighborhood projects such as sidewalks and playgrounds. For those advocating for an off-leash area at Eastgate Park, the Board feels that levy funds should be used for this purpose instead of NEP funds.

Noting the hour, Mayor Degginger suggested rescheduling the presentation in order for the Council to give the topic its full consideration.

Mr. Foran referred the Council to the Agenda Memo in the meeting packet for detailed information on the study recommendations and the issues raised by the Park Board.

Councilmember Chelminiak noted that this is an emotional issue for many members of the community, which is further complicated by its relationship to the Eastgate Park master planning process. Residents have been using the Eastgate property as a shared use off-leash dog area for many years, before the property was acquired by the City. If this use is not continued in the Eastgate Park master plan, Mr. Chelminiak opined that the facility should be replaced at Robinswood Park using levy monies. He is opposed to using NEP funds to provide specific features at public parks.

- At 10:00 p.m., Deputy Mayor Balducci moved to extend the meeting by 10 minutes. Mayor Degginger seconded the motion.
- The motion to extend the meeting carried by a vote of 6-0.



Deputy Mayor Balducci concurred that this topic deserves more attention than can be given tonight. She noted that allowing dogs in parks is an established use that citizens have come to rely on. She expressed concern that the Eastgate location is not one of the recommended candidate sites. If the Council chooses to discontinue the shared use area at the Eastgate property, she feels this type of open field experience should be provided elsewhere. She suggested preserving some portion of the current Eastgate meadow.

Councilmember Davidson is not in favor of using NEP funds for this purpose. He expressed concern with the 4-3 vote by the Park Board, and he would like more time to review and understand the issues.

Mayor Degginger concurred with the need for further discussion. He cautioned against measuring the extent to which a community is dog friendly by the number of its dog parks, as there are other ways to be dog friendly. He acknowledged the interest in shared use areas, but noted the importance of ensuring that all park users are safe. Mr. Degginger encouraged further review of the Eastgate Park issues.

(d) American Recovery and Reinvestment Act – Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants

Sheida Sahandy, Assistant to the City Manager, provided a brief presentation regarding the use of Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant funding available under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Bellevue's allocation is \$1.29 million. The Eastside C-7 Cities have identified clean mobility and energy efficiency as the areas representing the best opportunity for progress and cohesiveness among the cities.

Ms. Sahandy said staff is formulating a proposal for Council consideration in the near future.

Councilmember Davidson said this topic was discussed at the National League of Cities Conference. He supports moving forward.

Councilmember Lee supports pursuing funding and focusing on areas that provide the most realistic opportunity for success.

At 10:11 p.m., Mayor Degginger declared the meeting adjourned.

Michelle Y. Murphy  
Deputy City Clerk

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